



MID-YORK

LIBRARY SYSTEM

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE BUDGET DIVISION STAFF
UTICA HEARING AT SUNYIT
NOVEMBER 27, 2007

Good evening. My name is Mary Lou Caskey and I am the Director of the Mid-York Library System, a cooperative public library system serving 43 member libraries in Oneida, Herkimer and Madison counties. I am also a member of the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries and the Legislative Committee of the New York Library Association.

I have come to talk to you about continuing and making permanent the supplemental aid to library systems and the construction aid for public libraries that was appropriated last year. This meant about \$90,000 to my system for supplemental aid and about \$406,000 for construction funds to be shared among 43 libraries and the system HQ. Let me tell you how we used some of that money.

In response to many requests we began offering MYaudio2go, a downloadable audio books service. (<http://midYork.lib.overdrive.com>). Customers can choose a book and download it to their computer to listen to, or send it to a compatible MP3 player to listen while exercising or working. Thanks to this funding, we were able to institute it with the system paying for the hosting charges and the members purchasing the titles. After only 6 months we have 600 customers signed up for this service and they have checked out nearly 3,000 titles.

We also presented the Regional Read this year. People throughout our three county area were encouraged to read The World Is Flat by Thomas Friedman and the member libraries presented many programs and discussions for all ages on the topic of Globalization. We partnered with the area Chambers of Commerce and schools, colleges and businesses to get the whole community to read, talk and think about our place in a global economy. See our website www.midYork.org/regionalread . We included several blogging opportunities as a

way to expose the community to some new ways of communicating. Hundreds of people read or listened to the book and attended programs relating to it. Libraries are uniquely positioned to facilitate community discussion and education.

Another high priority for public libraries is the **public library construction funding**. Until this money became available, our system received about \$23,000 annually to share among 43 libraries for construction. The new funding has made it possible for 11 of our libraries to add on to their buildings or move to new buildings. Many of our members have very old buildings that are in need of improvements for energy efficiency, safety and better use.

There are many good reasons to support libraries. For instance, most of the libraries in our system offer wireless access for business people, students or anyone with a laptop.

Reading for pleasure may not be viewed as important to our economic well being, but according to a recent report from the National Endowment for the Arts, "Americans—particularly young Americans—appear to be reading less for fun, and as that happens, their reading test scores are declining. At the same time, performance in other academic disciplines like math and science is dipping for students whose access to books is limited, and employers are rating workers deficient in basic writing skills." "Better reading skills were also correlated with higher income."

"---[it was] noted that students who lived in homes with more than 100 books, but whose parents only completed high school, scored higher on math tests than those students whose parents held college degrees (and were therefore likely to earn higher incomes), but who lived in homes with fewer than 10 books."

Books in the home translates to higher test scores, better educated and higher earning citizens.

I am hoping that you will see the value of maintaining the Supplemental Library Aid and the Construction Aid and making them permanent. While this represents a very small portion of the state budget, it makes a disproportionately large difference in the lives of many of its citizens.

Libraries can play a bigger role in the economic engine of our region if they are well-supported. Thank you for your time on this most important matter.

*Quotes were taken from the November 19, 2007 NY Times article by Motoko Rich, **Study Links Drop in Test Scores to a Decline in Time Spent Reading**. It discusses a 99 page report put out by the National Endowment for the Arts.